

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE MEASURE AND
THE MANNER OF DISTRIBUTING.

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A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE

CHURCH OF ST. MARY AT TOWER,

IPSWICH,

ON SUNDAY, JUNE 25, 1786, FOR THE BENEFIT
OF A CHARITY SCHOOL.

By EDWARD PEARSON, A. M.

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I P S W I C H:

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1786.

RESIDENCE OF THE SECRETARY
OF THE ARMY AND NAVAL OFFICE

MEMORANDUM

FOR THE SECRETARY



BY THE SECRETARY

1853

AND THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY AND NAVAL OFFICE

FOR THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY AND NAVAL OFFICE

ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS Sermon was preached for the benefit of a Charity School in this town, consisting of sixty boys and thirty girls, who are clothed and educated chiefly by voluntary contributions; and the profits of publication, if any should arise, will be applied to the same purpose.

E. P.

IPSWICH,
Dec. 14, 1786.

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E. P.

Printed by
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I TIMOTHY vi. 17, 18.

*Charge them that are rich in this world,---
that they do good, that they be rich in good
works, ready to distribute.*

THIS direction, delivered to Timothy by an inspired apostle, may justly be considered as addressed, through him, to every minister of the gospel. It is the office of every minister, therefore, to enforce, on all proper occasions, the observance of the duty to which this direction relates.

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THE general obligation, indeed, to the duty of doing good, by distributing to the necessities of others, is sufficiently acknowledged. Every christian will admit, that, since it is the distinguishing mark of our religion to inculcate love towards each other, none can be sincere disciples of it, but those who possess that love, and who express it, as far as they are able, by beneficent actions; and that, therefore, he who hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, can scarcely have the spirit of christianity dwelling in him.

BUT though the *obligation* be admitted, the motives to discharge it may not always present themselves with sufficient force. Experience convinces us, that we often, in a speculative view, acknowledge truths which
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have too little effect on our practice, and that we have need to be exhorted to duties which we allow to be of self-evident obligation.

It is not without its use, therefore, that the considerations, by which this species of beneficence may be recommended, are frequently presented to the view. We can never be too firmly persuaded, that the intention of Providence, in the present unequal distribution of things, was, principally, to furnish us with opportunities of improving in the habits of virtue; and that such opportunities cannot, with innocence, be neglected. It is by actions, chiefly, that we are formed to virtue: and, since no species of virtue is more valuable, in the sight of God, than a *benevolent disposition*, great care is taken, that it should be continually exercised by a course of beneficent

actions. If all men had an *equal share* of property, or could all men, by their own unassisted efforts, supply themselves with the necessaries and conveniences of life, occasions might be wanting of calling forth those affections, which it is the design of christianity to cultivate: it is certain, at least, that those occasions would not be so frequent as they are at present. For, when, on a view of the world around us, we see misery which it is in our power to alleviate, we are led, both by the feelings of humanity, and by the positive precepts of our religion, to exert ourselves in the relief of it; and the doing so tends gradually to form in us that benevolence, which will dispose us to promote the happiness of mankind in *every* instance. We should, in general, consider the occurrences of life as methods of moral discipline,---- as the instances, by which the dictates of
reason

reason and the precepts of revelation are to be exemplified. And, with respect to cases of distress, in particular, we should consider them as trials of our sincerity in the profession of that religion, which has universal happiness for its object; and as furnishing the means of cultivating that frame of mind, in which our own happiness must principally consist.

If, then, we see the benevolent design, let us be careful not to hinder its completion; ---if this is the effect which should arise from the unequal distribution of property, let us do *our* part to accomplish it; for, if this effect does *not* follow, there is an evil suffered without any consequent good^a; and

^a It may seem, perhaps, to some, that this assertion is too unlimited: nor is it my intention to deny, that the distress of poverty, in common with other afflictions, may still have a good effect, in exercising the patience and resignation

and he who with-holds his endeavour to produce that good frustrates, in some degree, the intentions of Heaven, and perverts a wise and merciful provision into a cause of useless misery.

BUT were we even to admit, that a readiness to the performance of this duty is never wanting;---- that all, who profess themselves disciples of the gospel, evince their sincerity, by being sufficiently *disposed* to distribute; yet great difficulties might still arise, respecting the *circumstances of doing it*.

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signation of the sufferer. But it is to be remembered, that beneficence is the appointed instrument, by which such distress is to be prevented from going *too far*; for it *may* proceed to the *destruction* of the sufferer. And we need not, certainly, with-hold our hand from doing good, through fear that occasions, by which patience and resignation may be exercised, should be too few: for this is a matter with which we have no concern: it is not our business, in this case, to *prove* and *discipline* men, but simply to *do them good*.

IN the simple state of society to which the apostle had respect, when he delivered the direction in the text, it might be sufficient to exhort to liberality in very *general* terms. The christians, we know, at the first propagation of the gospel, were in a peculiar situation: while they were a small body, distinct from the bulk of mankind, there was little danger that any changes, produced by the distribution of their property, could materially affect the interests of society at large. Besides, as most of those who then professed christianity were *really* christians, and acted, in all things, by the *principles* of their profession, there was no danger of their *abusing* the generosity of their brethren, either by receiving bounty when it was not wanted, or applying it to purposes for which it was not designed. We find, accordingly, that, for a considerable time, they paid no regard to
separate

separate interests; but, as persons who had a full confidence in each other, and who were mutually assured that all acted in singleness of heart, *they had all things common.*

BUT, in the present more complicated scene, where christianity is the religion of the state; where a diversity of characters is to be supported; where, consequently, there is a great variety of interfering interests; and where the *profession* of christian principles does not always, with certainty, denote their existence, *more particular* directions seem to be necessary. As, on the one hand, men should be excited to distribute, and admonished, that, under the pretext of superior and inconsistent obligations, they do not entirely overlook *this*; so, on the other, they are to be cautioned, lest, by an *injudicious mode* of distributing,

tributing, they weaken the motives to industry and frugality.

AT the present period, therefore, a minister of the gospel, in order to obey the injunction of the text, and effectually to inculcate the duty of distributing, must be allowed to step beyond the limit of *general exhortation*, and to extend his attention to the *measure* and the *manner* of distributing.

I SHALL, accordingly, presume on your indulgence to permit me, First, to make a few observations with respect to the *degree of our liberality*; and, Secondly, with respect to the *manner of applying it*.

WITH respect to the *measure* of liberality, it is evident, that only a *general* direction can be given: and, indeed, it is highly proper, that in a matter of this nature,

ture, much should be left to the determination of every individual; since, if it were otherwise, if the measure of bounty could be prescribed to every one, and an authoritative reason alleged for it, much of its merit, as the effusion of a benevolent heart, would be prevented. Every man, says the apostle, according as he *purposeth in his heart*, so let him give; not grudgingly, nor of *necessity*; for God loveth a *cheerful* giver.

THE general rule, then, is, That we give so much to relieve the wants of others, as is consistent with the support of ourselves and our families, according to our character in life; always remembering, that if our income increase, our liberality should increase in a due proportion.

EVERY man should apply this rule to
his

his own particular situation, with simplicity and fairness, with the uprightness of one, who wishes to pay a proper regard to obligations of every kind.

IT ought, undoubtedly, to be his first care, to make a suitable provision for himself, and for those with whom he is more immediately connected. But there is an *excess* of care, in this respect, which ought to be avoided. From a notion of prudence and foresight, we may neglect other duties of obvious obligation, and incur the censure due to those, who attempt to compensate for their neglect of one duty, by an overcharged attention to another. To take care, in matters of this nature, for *all possible*, and *far distant* events, is to betray a distrust in Providence; and, if admitted as a principle of action, would excuse all, but persons of independant and permanent property,

from contributing to the necessities of others.

CHARITY, it is sometimes said, should begin *at home*. This, indeed, is a truth; but this, like other truths thus briefly expressed, is very liable to mislead by being misinterpreted. Though Charity should *begin* at home, it certainly ought not to *end* there. Though our *first* care should be, according to the apostles direction, to provide for those of our own household; yet we are also commanded, on the same authority, to do good, if we have opportunity, to *all* men. The circle of our beneficence should spread wider and wider, till, if our ability extend so far, it

“Takes every creature in of every kind.”

BUT men are not always satisfied even with the certainty of being themselves supplied

plied with the necessaries and conveniences of life, nor with making the most ample provision for their families: they form plans of increase far beyond all ideas of sufficiency for these purposes, and endeavour perpetually to add to that, which is already abundant.

THERE are many considerations, no doubt, which render the desire of improving our situation in life, while confined within proper limits, allowable and rational. But since the consideration which *most* tends to render it so is, that we may, by that means, be enabled to become more extensively useful, the desire is certainly pursued with mistaken ardour, when it causes us to neglect the ability of doing good, which we possess already. The desire of riches, we know, often increases with the increase of our possessions; and, if we do

do not begin to be beneficent, till we can find no pretence to wish for an addition to our store, we shall, it is to be feared, be in great danger of deferring it, till the season of action is no more.

IT concerns us, therefore, to take care, that we do not deceive ourselves in this, and rest satisfied with the *appearance* of virtue, while we neglect the *reality*; that we do not, under the show of an enlarged plan of beneficence, act by the impulse of ill governed passions; and seek, in the accumulation of wealth, the gratification of vanity, ambition, or avarice.

I PROCEED, Secondly, to direct your attention to the *mode of distributing*.

IT has justly been observed, that “there
“ is scarcely any thing more difficult, in an
“ age

“ age like the present, than for those, who
 “ have the strongest *inclinations*, as well
 “ as the greatest *abilities* of doing acts of
 “ beneficence, to find out in *what manner*,
 “ and upon *what objects* in particular, they
 “ may best bestow their charitable offices;
 “ so that the benefit of them may, at the
 “ same time, be the *most extensive*, and the
 “ *least liable* to abuse*.” Nor is it possi-
 ble, in this case, to lay down any certain
 and determinate rules. It may, however,
 be observed in general, that whatever we
 give, we ought to give with *caution*, and
 with *some* ground at least for believing, that
 our bounty will answer a beneficial pur-
 pose. The effects of *indiscriminate* Cha-
 rity have been found so pernicious, that
 the wisdom of the legislature has, in some
 instances, thought fit to discourage it. And,
 indeed, it is evident, that such Charity
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* Dr. S. CLARKE.

may not only *prevent good*, by intercepting the relief due to the really indigent and distressed; but also, by the encouragement which it affords to idleness and profligacy, may deprive the public of useful labour, and injure the persons themselves on whom it is undeservedly bestowed.

No excuse, for the want of attention in this point, can be drawn from the *quantity* of the alms, which we are able to bestow. If we can give but *little*, care surely should be taken, that that little be usefully employed: and, if we give *much*, as it is capable, when *well applied*, of producing more extensive good, so also will it become, by *misapplication*, a more powerful instrument of evil. The merit of our alms depends not at all on the *measure* of our bounty, while it is proportionable to our ability; for if there be first a willing mind,
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it is accepted according to what a man *batb*, and not according to what he *batb not*: but we shall not, certainly, be excused from taking all the care we can, that the *application* of our alms be such, as may best answer the purposes, for which alms are directed to be given.

IN general, it seems advisable so to give, as most to promote the real and lasting happiness of those we give to, and the welfare of society at large. Both these objects cannot, indeed, in every instance, be made to concur; and since, in private charities, the benefit of the individual is the *great* and *immediate* object, it may be sufficient, if we say, that this benefit ought ever to be effected in a way, which is not *inconsistent* with the public good.

THERE is, however, *one* instance, in

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which

which these objects concur to an admirable degree; and that is, in the bringing up of young persons, whose circumstances would not otherwise admit of it, in the principles of learning and religion. This, while it secures to the immediate objects of our beneficence advantages of the most important kind, with respect both to their temporal and eternal welfare, provides also for the profit of the *community*, by enabling many, who would otherwise be *hurtful*, to become *useful* and *valuable* members of it.

It is not to be expected, however, that *any* mode of beneficence, though evidently capable of producing much good, should be entirely free from objection. Indeed, it is rather to be expected, from the very circumstance of its being capable of producing extensive good, that, as it may also, if abused, be productive of much evil, those,

those, who attend only to the unfavourable side of the question, will see it teeming with tremendous mischiefs. But let not our benevolent intentions be frustrated by the mere *apprehension* of danger. Few actions are attended with consequences which are of a purely beneficial nature; and if we cease from action till we have security of effecting good unmixed with evil, we shall not very soon exert ourselves. We may observe, in general, that as human life itself is a mixture of good and evil, so every *human plan of action*, of any considerable extent, comprehends inconveniences as well as advantages. And it seems, indeed, wisely provided, that our *judgments*, as well as our *dispositions*, should be improved by the occurrences of life; that as our *compassion* and *generosity* are excited by *distress*, so our *prudence* and *discretion* should be exercised by the *difficulties* in effectually relieving it,

THIS, then, is the use we should make of such difficulties; they should awake our *caution* in action, but not repress our vigour. As it ought not to be sufficient to recommend a plan of conduct, to show that it has *some* beneficial effects; so it ought not to be received, as its condemnation, that it will be attended with some evils. If we would judge accurately, in such cases, we must not confine our attention to *one side* only, but form our conclusion from an estimation and comparison of both good and evil consequences. The consideration, therefore, that a scheme, evidently capable of producing good, may, by perversion, be productive of evil, should teach us to provide against the abuses of it, but should not prevail on us hastily to abandon it. If, on the whole, it be capable of producing more good than harm; and if the harm be of an *accidental* nature, and
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may, by proper precautions, be avoided, it is certainly justifiable, in a prudential view, to pursue it; and, if pursued from the proper motives, it has the full merit of beneficence.

IN opposition to these principles, a writer*, celebrated for his many paradoxical opinions, has employed the abuses to which Charity Schools are liable, as arguments against the establishment and support of them. After having attempted to prove, that private vices are public benefits, he seems to have been disposed to proceed a step further, and to show, that private virtues are public evils.

THE principle objections, which he has urged against these institutions, may, I think, be reduced to these two.

FIRST,

Dr. MANDEVILLE,

FIRST, That if persons of the lower ranks of life spend the early part of their days in the mere *acquisition of learning*, and are not habituated betimes to manual labour, they will be ill qualified for the chearful and effectual discharge of those employments, to which they *ought*, and to which they probably *will* hereafter be called: And, Secondly, That learning and knowlege, in persons of this description, is an acquisition hurtful in itself, as rendering them less happy in their station, and less valuable members of society, than they would have been if perfectly ignorant.

THE first of these objections, it must be acknowledged, is of considerable weight, and cannot, I believe, be so properly answered, as by recommending, that, in all institutions of this nature, a portion of the children's time be employed in some laborious

rious occupation; and that the habit of diligence, and the patient enduring of fatigue be early and constantly cultivated.

I AM happy to reflect, that, in the present case, this answer is unnecessary; the Institution, in whose favour I am called upon to address you, has been in possession of this advantage for a considerable time.

I PROCEED, therefore, to observe, that the second objection is, as I conceive, without sufficient foundation. The knowledge which Charity Schools are calculated to teach, can never, in its genuine tendency, be hurtful to the individuals to whom it is communicated, nor prejudicial to the interests of the public. I should, indeed, have thought it superfluous to allege *reasons* for this opinion, if it had not lately appeared, by the objections urged against

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Sunday Schools, that the opposite opinion has still its supporters.

IN all political plans, which have the welfare of mankind in view, it should be a point of the first importance, to treat men as *rational* beings; to give them an opportunity of exerting and improving those faculties, in which the distinguishing excellence of our nature consists; and to enable them to answer the grand purpose of their *present* existence, by making a due preparation for an *eternal* one. It has, we know, been predicted, and the benevolent mind looks forward to the completion of the prediction with joyful expectation, That the knowlege of christianity shall, at length, universally prevail; that the Earth shall be *filled* with the knowlege of the Lord, as the waters cover the Sea. But how shall this desired event ever take place, if it be
admitted

admitted as a principle, That a considerable part of mankind ought to be kept in ignorance. It is, indeed, denied by some, that this principle is unfriendly to religion; and they wish us to receive it as a maxim, That ignorance is the mother of devotion. But ignorance, surely, is not the mother of *that* devotion, which it is our duty and our interest to encourage: it may, indeed, produce *superstitious fear*, and may dispose men implicitly to receive any opinions, and to follow any practice, which may chance to be proposed to them; but that *rational* piety, which is pleasing in itself to God, and productive of truly virtuous conduct, must have a very different origin; it must be founded in *knowledge*, and be the result of a *well-informed mind*. And, since *literature* is one great instrument of propagating knowledge, and of conveying religious information, we should render the

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opportunity of obtaining a competent share of it as universal as possible^b. It is not, indeed, to be asserted, that every particular person is virtuous and religious in proportion to his knowledge; but it is certain, that knowledge is essentially requisite to a virtuous and religious character; and it may, I think, be justly said, that, in every age and nation in which christianity has been preached, the *most general practice of virtue and religion* has constantly attended the *most general dispersion of knowledge*^c.

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^b THAT *literary* and *religious* knowledge nearly keep pace with each other, will scarcely, I think, be doubted by any one, who will take the trouble to compare the state of them, as they exist in the several nations of the world. In truth, the design of Providence in affording to these latter ages, by the invention of printing and otherwise, the means of an universal dispersion of literary knowledge, is too obvious to be overlooked.

^c THIS assertion is confined to *christian* times and countries,

WE may observe, therefore, in general, that great must be the evil, which can overbalance the advantage of having children instructed in that learning, which is able to make them wise unto salvation; and that nothing should be permitted to interfere with it, but what bears demonstration of its necessity. But it cannot, surely, be demonstrated, that ignorance in

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tries, because there is reason to believe, from the representation of historians as well as satyrists, that the most learned periods, among the ancient *Greeks* and *Romans*, were not the most virtuous and religious. And we need not seek far for the reason of this. The knowledge, which discovered to them the falsity of the established religion of their country, but which was unable to direct them to the *true* one, could not be depended on as a guide to rectitude of conduct. It was true, therefore, in such circumstances, and perhaps it is true *only* in such, that the common people, with respect to religious matters, were happier in *ignorance* than in a *partial knowledge*. How far this may still be the case, in countries where the *Romish* religion prevails, it is not my purpose to inquire; but surely, in this nation, where the gospel is preached in so great purity, every step in religious knowledge may reasonably be expected to be a step in virtue.

any class of the people is necessary, either for the temporal benefit of that class, or for the *public* good.

IN answer to the particular objection, That the acquisition of learning tends to disqualify the lower order of people for the duties of their station, by disposing them to disdain the inferior employments of life, we may observe, that this is an *accidental* effect, which proceeds from the *partial distribution* of learning. It is only from the comparison of themselves with those who *know less*, that men become *proud* of their knowledge; as, indeed, is the case with respect to every other acquisition or possession. But we wish, and it is the tendency of Charity Schools to realize the wish, that a portion of knowledge, sufficient to call forth the powers of the mind, and to qualify it for the discharge of religious

gious duties, should be dispensed to *all*. If this were once effected, there would be no room for that consciousness of superiority, which is said to be productive of such a pernicious effect. This consideration, then, far from discouraging us in promoting these establishments, ought to animate our zeal; and though knowledge, like all things else, is liable to abuse; yet, since without it, the great purpose of promoting human happiness cannot be accomplished, we should not be deterred from the dispersion of it, by any accidental and trivial inconveniences. Care, however, should be taken, that the abuse be prevented as much as possible. Accordingly, it is ever to be recommended to those, to whom the management of Charity Schools is entrusted, to direct their principal attention to the *behaviour* and *morals* of the children. Their improvement in *literature* is but a secondary consideration.

tion. We do not, in this case, contend for a literary education as an *end*, but as the necessary *means* to a *moral* and *religious* one. They should be taught, in particular, early to cultivate that *humility of disposition*, which ranks so highly among christian virtues; to prepare themselves to act, with resignation and cheerfulness, in any station, to which Providence may call them; and they should frequently be reminded, that, from the circumstances of their education, and the intentions of those who contribute to it, they are under peculiar obligations to show themselves patterns of virtuous conduct. If, then, they thus be taught the principles of their religious and moral duties, and be exercised in the habits of obedience, attention, and diligence; and if, by application to some manual employment, they are, at the same time, inured to the support of moderate labour,

labour, there is every reason to believe, that Charity Schools will continue to prove one great instrument of advancing the good of mankind.

HAVING thus addressed myself to your *judgments*, I think it unnecessary to appeal to your *feelings*. It is to be wished, on *all* occasions, that our conduct should be directed by *cool* and *dispassionate reasoning*, by a conviction of its rectitude and utility, rather than by a transient glow of warm affections; but it is more especially requisite in matters, which involve consequences important to the public welfare. If, therefore, you are convinced, from an estimate of the demands which other duties may have upon you, that you ought to give *something* to the relief and comfort of those who are in want; and if you think, with me, that a part of that something may
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profitably be employed in the education and discipline of indigent youth, I desire no other security for your beneficence in general, nor for its being exerted, in a due degree, on the *present* occasion.



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